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Harris, B.F.

The press, it's danger and it's duty

[Champaign, Ill.]

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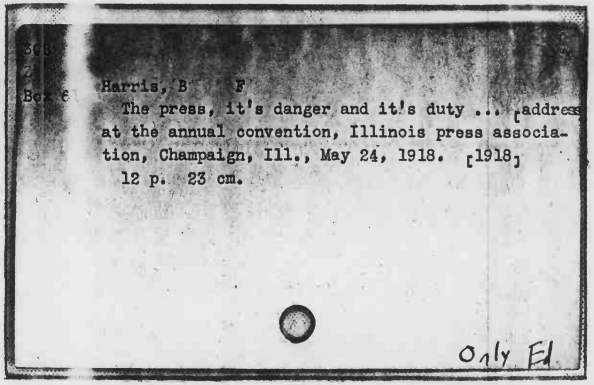
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The Press
It's Danger and It's Duty

B. F. HARRIS
President First National Bank
Champaign, Illinois

At the Annual Convention
ILLINOIS PRESS ASSOCIATION
Champaign, Ill., May 24, 1918

The Press can "Pull Illinois Out of the Mud."

HARD ROADS GIVEN TO US

IF it was within my power to secure for Illinois farmers and their families some of the things much needed for their welfare, and my choice should be limited to one thing, I would without hesitation choose 365-day roads,—hard roads.

For,—good roads will bring an endless chain of blessings and most of the other things that must come.

The farm was isolated; was a separate world till the automobile and decent roads began to appear.

With permanent roads will come social life and co-operation; better schools and churches, better attended; better and new marketing methods; farming will come into its own and the farmer and his family will become citizens of the state and nation instead of toilers, tied to a township.

And to think that Illinois, under Governor Lowden, has devised a plan that is making all the other states and the nation marvel, whereby we are to build at one stroke, —as soon as the war is over,—a system of 4,400 miles of road, going into every corner of the state, without a single cent of taxes on any soul in the state,—the whole thing to be paid for, principal and interest, solely by the license fees now being paid by automobile owners.

I say "we are to biuld",—because, all we have to do is just to vote next November that we approve this plan and the bond issue, and nobody but a Russian, who don't know enough to stand up for his rights, would fail to vote and fight to get such roads without tax.

The automobile owners are willing to give these roads to the State,—paid for in full,—if we vote YES.

B. F. H.

THE PRESS—IT'S DANGER AND IT'S DUTY

It may be trite, but it is truth to say that just as a bad or bought newspaper, or a chain of such papers may do incalculable harm, yet, a good newspaper can be the greatest instrument for good in the community, bar none. Such a paper is shaping and building, and by giving all the news and facts is permitting its readers to develop a public opinion and consciousness that irresistably encourages or drives every other worth while instrumentality and citizen to do his work when and as it should be done.

Never was there such opportunity and obligation on the public press as today. On citizen and law maker is the equal obligation to encourage every bona fide effort to honestly and sanely inform the people through a numerous and free American press, with every possible aid in postal privileges for such a press and our free schools have been and can be in larger measure the greatest gift of democracy.

Three great undermining influences are now at work to destroy this democratizing dream, to the great detriment of the press and so to the greater detriment of the people.

The Menace

1. The drastic proposals in the matter of postal rates; particularly on National or widely circulated publications.

2. The marked tendency to consolidate and reduce the number of daily papers; reduction in the news agencies and the consolidation under one control of "plate" and "ready to print" matter from which concern fourteen thousand newspapers are furnished and have no other similar concerns from whom to buy.

3. The new Espionage Act.

The second dangerous tendency has been discussed in some detail by Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard of the New York Evening Post in the current Atlantic Monthly.

Speaking of this Western Newspaper Union, and its 14,000 clients he says: "In 1912 a United States court in Chicago forbade this very consolidation as one in restraint of trade; today it permits it because the great rise in the cost of plate matter, from four to seventeen cents a pound, seems to necessitate the extinction of the old competition and the establishment of a monoply. Hhe court was convinced that this

field of newspaper enterprise will no longer support two rival concerns. An immense power which could be used to influence public opinion is thus placed in the hands of the officers of a money-making concern, for news matter is furnished as well as news photogravures.

The Politician's Chance

Only the other day I heard of a boast that a laudatory article praising a certain astute Democratic politician had appeared in no less than 7,000 publications of the Union's clients. Who can estimate the value of such an advertisement? Who can deny the power enormously to influence rural public opinion for better or for worse? Who can deny that the very innocent aspect of such a publication makes it a particularly easy, as well as effective way of conducting propaganda for better or for worse?"

I would not underestimate great and nationalized organization which must be more than ever encouraged under proper and necessary regulation,—because there must be constructive opportunity; opportunity for leadership to show the unlimited and ultimate success that business and enterprise may attain if properly carried on.

We are beginning to realize, however, that a few or a number of great industries are not to make of us, and cannot make of us a great industrial Nation, any more than a few or a number of great banks can make us a rich Nation, a financial center; any more than a few or a number of great universities can make us an educated people; any more than a few bonanza farmers or corn kings can make the type of agriculture and rural life we must have in this country; any more than a great consolidated centralized metropolitan or lesser-city press can usurp or function for an untrammeled press intown and village any more than a few or a number of citizens and patriots can give us the government we ought to have and the unity and loyalty this Nation must have.

What Makes America

But,—the thing that has made America great and is going to make her greater, make her strong, make her enduring,—*if we see to it,* is a great multitude of little industries, of little banks, of cross-roads schools, of millions of real, prosperous farmers, of thousands of staunch constructive newspapers, and publications widely circulated, carrying honest statements of essential facts.

It takes all of these;—thousands of them, and each of them and every citizen on the job to win decisively for democracy in *peace or war.*

We can't have and don't propose to have our thinking done for us wholesale or by mail-order methods. We propose to feed the great broad, democratic, humanizing river of American thought and opinion with thousands and hundreds of thousands of uncontaminated springs and rivulets and streams flowing from the isolated quarters; from the rural community centers; from industrial neighborhoods of the people past the great centers,—energizing and purifying as it surges surely on to the ocean of our desires,—the goal of our democracy.

A Revolutionary Act

The third danger to private citizen and publisher alike is the Espionage Act, now on the President's table, amended after strenuous debate to meet administration wishes. This reminds that we cannot recall any instance in the last few years wherein the legislative branch of the government has failed to conform to the demands of the executive branch.

Senator Frances' amendment, passed by the Senate "provided that the act shall not be construed as limiting the liberty or impairing the right of any individual to publish or speak what is true, with good motives, and for justifiable ends." Yet, an American Congress, under direction of the Executive denies this right to American citizens, and strikes it from the bill, and so "pitiless publicity" is dead.

It seems to me that this is the most remarkable legislation ever enacted under a republican form of government, and there is question as to its constitutionality. The Adamson Bill now takes second place.

England Free Since 1793

England during her Napoleonic wars did not refuse, nor does she now refuse her people the right to tell the truth "with good motives and for justifiable ends." Way back under german George II about 1793 Charles James Fox amended the Law of Libel so as to have it all subject to the jury. Before this amendment the jury was confined,—as this new act now confines it,—simply to finding whether the defendant published the matter complained of. Since 1793 therefore, in England and here, free criticism and discussion of governmental affairs has been the rule, *EXCEPT,* for the Alien and Sedition Law of 1798 here, commonly known as the John Adams "Gag Law."

This law led to the overthrow and destruction of the old federal party which never recovered from the odium of this measure.

We are getting used to phrases, yet it is worth while to repeat that, in speaking in the severest terms against this Gag Law Thomas Jeffer-

son said, "Error may be left free if truth be left equally free to combat it."

This new law, turning back the English common law 125 years and reversing our patron saint, Thomas Jefferson, now provides that the uttered or published language is "disloyal or contemptuous" depending entirely on the interpretation which the President and his advisors place upon the language.

Public criticism is an inseparable and inalienable feature of democratic government and while sometimes unpleasant and often mistaken, yet,—in the long run it directly and indirectly works well for the people and usually for the men and measures criticised.

The English and French permit the privilege of free speech to the point that they may displace their incompetent leaders with little delay or ceremony.

German—the Language of Sedition

Having spoken of the press tendencies and dangers that we must all cooperate in avoiding, I want to speak now of a sinister danger to the Nation wherein the press can render inestimable service.

I have reference to enemy propaganda and German as the language of Sedition. For years, and more than ever now we are being hindered and hamstrung by the propaganda of the Hun in a hundred ways.

Their plan for forty years has been the murder of Christian civilization and their object the enslavement of mankind.

"More insidious than a bayonet; more pervasive than gas and flame; more certain than machine gun execution; more impossible to withstand or combat,—except by a counter drive,—is this peril behind our lines and in our midst."

General Pershing recently declared;—"Smash that damnable Hun propaganda and we will smash the German line."

A vicious and persistent form of German propaganda is the story that whatever is intolerable in Germany comes from the autocratic system of which the Kaiser is the head and therefore we do a great wrong if we would not accept peace terms based on a change in the German Government; that there should be forgiveness for whatever wrongs have been committed and an effort to forget.

Anyone who disassociates Germany from the German people or, rather, ascribes Germany's aggressions to the autocracy and not to the German people as a whole is blind to the facts. No people would have supported a government as the German people have supported the

German monarch unless they were heart and soul with him in sympathy and purpose. The German plans have been too long in forming not to be national in character. No people not in full accord with them would have supported them so long.

Plans Failed, "Next War" They Won't

That German plans have miscarried; that the schedule has been disarranged; that victory has been delayed or deferred makes necessary a new program, and they talk even now of the "next war." It is appreciated in Germany that Germany erred. It was a great error to bring America into the war. Germany over estimated Teutonic sentiment in America and, besides, supposed America was so mixed in population, so unprepared, and so loosely knit that it couldn't play any military part of consequence. It had no merchant marine. Its navy was ridiculously small. It had Japan and Mexico to worry about. Besides it was thousands of miles away.

It is regrettable, of course, that the Mexican troubles which Germany fomented did not divert America's attention as expected; that the U-boat didn't cripple British shipping and bring Britain to sue for peace; that America was forced into the conflict and despite woeful unpreparedness it began, lumberingly, to organize its mighty forces.

The Huns would spread the idea throughout America that if Germany changes her government that is all that is required to make her good. Then, if Germany makes peace, it should be satisfactory. They suggest that we leave to Germany what was her territory before the war. Let Germany have what she has obtained in Russia and the East. Let her have her colonies. She needs them for the development of her trade.

The German-American says there is nothing wrong with Germany except, possibly, her present form of autrocracy. Change that, if you insist, and Germany is a good, peace-loving Germany. That is as plain as anything could be. Belgium; devastated France; U-boat horrors; enslavement of many peoples; they were but incidents of the war. Charge them to the Kaiser if you must charge them to anybody, but not to Germany, or rather, the German people, for everybody knows how peace-loving they are. Indemnities, annexations, all those terrible things only breed animosities that provoke war later.

Insidiously the Huns and a seditious press that voices the German desire spreads this idea, this propaganda for safeguarding sacred Ger-

many in case Germany fails to crucify France and England before America's strength developes.

German Peace in a Nut-Shell

Indemnities, annexations, Prussian domination must be the order if Germany wins but there must be forgiveness and universal good will if Germany fails.

Men who pose as Americans are the agents of Germany in this Anchor to Windward propaganda for Germany in America.

Germany has wrought greater havoc with her vicious, vallainous, intriguing propaganda than in any other way. She has made no headway in any open, human methods;—everything she has accomplished has come through this hellish, underground, underworld system of hers with which the whole German Nation is in league.

The rank and file of the German Nation are as thoroughly given over to Hohenzollern ambitions and follow them as slavishly as the Chinese follow their craven gods.

It is a great privilege and life saving necessity for each of us to fight German propaganda in every form and any and all peace proposals that are short of the annihilation of Prussian plans and methods.

You men of the Illinois Press Association can hit in a thousand places at every stroke. You must maintain your rapid-fire guns day and night to demolish German propaganda and supply our own.

Abolish the Language

This brings us to the German language question, and every other foreign language in America, for that matter. I have taken this whole war very seriously almost from its inception and I am amply on record in that direction. I have considered no single phase of it more seriously than the question of the absolute suppression of the German language in America. I have argued privately for it on many occasions and find almost general consent today and now I want to go publicly on record as against the teaching and publications in the German language in America. It is argued that the foreign press helps Americanize foreigners and that without a foreign press is would be impossible to Americanize and educate the foreign born who do not understand English.

This argument cannot stand analysis. With the single exception of the German born, the foreign publications are considered absolutely superfluous by those for whom the publications are printed. This is the case of the publications printed in the French, the Italian, the Scandinavian and other languages. These publications barely exist, and

their circulation is exceedingly small. The foreign born comes to America with the definite intention to make the country his home and to raise his children as Americans. The melting process in their case is effected in one generation. Not so with the Germans. Germans of the second and third generations are at heart and in sentiment just as much German as were their fathers and grandfathers. The reason for this is apparent even to the most superficial observer. As Mr. Auguste Babize so well says: "The German in this country not only retains his language, but his manners, customs, traits and habits. His home, from the day he lands in America, is a German home; his children speak the German language first, last and all the time. That home, moreover, is always a little part of Germany. Visit that home, and the loyalty is to the land of the Kaiser. The German never loses an opportunity to impress and impose his views and his ways on all with whom he may come into contact. His intimate associates are German; he goes from his Germanized American home to a German club; he attends a church where prayers and sermons are in German; he transacts his business in German-owned banks; he sends his children where they absorb more German. He is here to do business in a German way for the German ideal. These facts are so patent that to deny them is useless.

His German printed newspapers—he seldom reads any other in his home—teach him not so much respect of America and love of her institutions as idolization of kultur; instead of Americanizing him, it further insures him to Germanic ways and Germanic customs. Hence the tremendous power wielded by the German-born politically in this country; a power so immense that it stupefies even United States Senators and congressmen and makes them forget duty to country and to their own fellow citizens.

Is such power found among the Italians, the French, the British, the Greeks, the Russian or any other foreign-born who come to the United States to better themselves? Hardly."

The Teuton Don't "Melt."

The melting pot in America has melted all other foreign-born except the Teuton. Is there a remedy? Assuredly and unless we mistake the signs of the times and the spirit of the people that remedy is soon to be applied. In the first place every Board of Education in this country should promptly cast out of its school curriculum the teaching of the German language in primary and grammer schools; in

the second place, the German newspaper should be determinedly suppressed. In peace or war, any publication which nurses the sentiment that allegiance to fatherland comes ahead of allegiance to the country of adoption, is disloyal. Is not this the very thing that the German printed newspapers have done? Isn't it also a fact that even in this war many of these publications would still preach the old doctrine if they dared?

They ask us, "how are you going to Americanize the alien except through the language he understands?" This alien has been able to find work, even though he did not know a word of English, simply because wherever he applied for work he was met by a German-speaking foreman, boss or superintendent, who gave him his instructions and orders in German. Do Italians, or Greeks, or Russians, or Frenchmen find similar conditions when they apply for work? Do they receive instructions in Italian, Greek or French? They very quickly discover that unless they can understand and make themselves understood in English, there is no job for them The result is that they apply themselves to learning English as quickly as possible. Do they learn that English in the publications printed in their own language? Hardly. These young and middle-aged men go to our night schools where English is taught them. They send their children there, also, to learn English, and nothing else. And when the little ones begin to babble in the new tongue, the elders encourage them to speak it in their homes that they may absorb it themselves the more quickly. Contrast this with the Teuton home where German is encouraged and English tabooed; where the German printed newspaper is the daily bible; and where kultur, as spelled by the Kaiser, is extolled. And when these little ones of other foreign-born go out and play, they play with little Americans. The German children mix only with Germans; they are sent to German dancing schools; later they join German clubs; worship the German god and sneer and disparage any and everything that is not German.

Under Two Flags

Hentig, Rein, Hoeniger and dozens of other German political writters and professors spread their specious and perfidious doctrine that men can be loyal and honorable citizens of the country in which they live and at the same time members of a foreign nationality; sharing its spirit, affections and aspirations. There has long been published in Germany a quarterly magazine by the well-known society "The Union for Germanism in Foreign Lands." It states its purpose as "the preservation and promotion of the Germanization of over thirty million people of German blood dwelling outside of the German Empire and spreading the German language and civilization throughout the world." The duplicity and complicity of the German government is shown by its 1913 enactment of the Debruck law. Unique in the history of citizenship legislation it provides,—that if an emigrant from Germany, who is about to be naturalized makes application to a German consul, he may retain his German citizenship even after he is invested with that of his adopted country.

The German is so dominating, so wholly for self and fatherland that he will not even adopt foreign words that he needs in his own language. He must make a new word all German. Many of them learned tennis from the English but they have used clumsy German combinations for all the English terms of the game. They would not adopt the French garage and taximeter, etc, as we do,—these little traits demonstrating that the later day Germans of the Kaiser, as contrasted with the 1848 type, are once a German, always a German.

A Tower of Babel

Any number of German publicists have undertaken to prophesy that in from forty to sixty years German would be the language of America. Is there any sane and informed American today who believes that Germany,—Government or Nation,—would stop at anything that would Germanize the earth?

We have our heel on the head of this awful thing and we must crush and tear it out root and branch in America and elsewhere to the utmost of our ability. We cannot permit our America, which is an ideal as well as a nation to become a "polyglot boarding house"; a tower of Babel or a confusion of tongues any more than a confusion of economic and social ideas, and the one begets the other.

Forbid Alien Ownership

We must work out new ideas for the regulation of international property relations. A great spirit of internationalism after the war is all right enough, but not detracting from or at the expense or neglect of an intensified American nationalism. Why permit alien ownership? Why permit foreigners to own lands, mines, factories, wharves, and whatnot, increasing thereby their advantage over own trade? The government estimates that only the large alien-german holdings in America aggregate two billions of dollars.

We are paying a bitter price for our wide-open policy to all comers,

and "peaceful penetration" should come to an end. There is patriotic, political and economic room for only one kind of citizenship in America —American citizenship—and that a pre-requisite for ownership.

We want no German-American, nor any kind of hyphenated alliances. We want no statues greeting us in Washington or elsewhere, —as that of Frederick the Great,—or of other foreigners whose lives and teachings are not in harmony with American ideals.

Hereafter we should tolerate the candidacy of no man or women, on any ticket, of any party, for any office, where the appeal is made to any race or nationality other than American.

"Living on a Volcano"

One-third of our population was born abroad or of foreign parents, and one-third of these from the Central Powers. We have a million unnaturalized German and Austrian men over twenty-one years of age, and one thousand five hundred foreign language papers with eleven million circulation. Our foreign-born are organized in societies to promote their racial solidarity, or customs often inimical to ours.

It is our business to convert the neutral alien; let the one for us, work or fight for us, and interne or imprison the others.

This problem is hourly more insistent for the percentage of these at home grows as the patriots go to the front.

Fifty-seven per cent. of our iron and steel workers, 61 per cent of the mine workers, and two-thirds of our railroad construction and maintenance gangs are foreign born, as also are 61 per cent of woolen and worsted mill operatives, and 72 per cent. of clothing trade workers in the large cities.

Three millions of our population cannot speak English; seven hundred thousand of draft age cannot read or write English, or any other language, and thirty to forty thousand of these came into the army by the first draft.

It is too true that we may learn "the high cost of living upon such a volcano." It will take years to correct the illiteracy, but the war crisis compels us to act instantly in regard to the other features.

Preparedness—Training

The greatest lesson we have to learn from war only emphasizes the lesson from life itself;—that the things which make for most in winning the war are the things that make for most in keeping, promoting and perpetuating peace and human welfare.

And finally,—we must stand for a thorough-going Americanization of our schools and for compulsory disciplining, democratizing, man-making, nation-saving, military training for all our boys.

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